SOUTH FORK NOOKSACK UPPER VAN ZANDT RESTORATION PROJECT – COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #2

Wednesday, January 29, 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Van Zandt Community Hall
4106 Valley Highway, Deming, WA 98244

Hosted by Lummi Nation

Workshop Goal

Share project updates with community members and gather input on design concepts for the South Fork Nooksack Upper Van Zandt restoration project (previously the Black Slough Project) on the South Fork Nooksack near Van Zandt. The goal of the project is to improve salmon habitat and avoid any increase to current flood risk.

Workshop Objectives

1. Provide an update on the project's status and next steps, including how design concepts emerged from the perspectives that participants shared at the first stakeholder workshop and through site-visits.
2. Provide an opportunity to ask questions about and provide input on design concepts.
3. Understand how workshop input will inform the preferred alternative selection/advancement.
4. Build relationships with project leads, project team, other interested parties, and community members.

Summary Notes

Welcome and Introduction

Melanie del Rosario, Triangle Associates, welcomed attendees and introduced the project team.

Project Team

- Alex Levell, *Deputy Program Manager/Geomorphologist/Project Manager,* Lummi Nation
- Kelley Turner, *Watershed Restoration Program Manager,* Lummi Nation
- Sydney Jantsch, *Restoration Scientist,* Lummi Nation
- Melanie del Rosario, *Lead Facilitator,* Triangle Associates
- Kate Galambos, *Outreach Support*, Triangle Associates
- Laura Zanetto, *Senior Scientist and Project Manager,* Natural Systems Design
- Nic Truscott*, Associate Principal Engineer, Engineer of Record*, Natural Systems Design

Attendees:

- Rick Batdorf

- Val Lloyd
- Jeff Margolis
- Galen Smith
- Alex Harris

Melanie del Rosario, Triangle Associates, welcomed attendees, reviewed the purpose of the workshop, and facilitated introductions of the project team and attendees. The workshop was the second focused on the South Fork Nooksack Upper Van Zandt Restoration (UVZ) Project, the first community workshop was hosted on September 10th, 2024. **See the workshop presentation slides here.**

Goals and Timeline of the UVZ Project

Alex Levell, Lummi Nation, provided a brief overview of the goals of the restoration project, which include:

- Address key concerns for habitat improvement including high water temperature, low habitat diversity, and key habitat features such as deep pools with woody cover.
- Avoid any increase to flood and erosion risk to properties and infrastructure in the project reach.

The objectives of the project are to improve in-stream habitat for salmonids within the SF Nooksack River near Van Zandt (River Mile 1.3-3) by installing a series of Engineered Log Jams (ELJs), in conjunction with other habitat restoration actions including:

- Create or encourage a variety of types of pools
- Identify opportunities to improve edge habitat with wood
- Explore modifications to non-functioning levees/bank protection
- Work with BNSF to improve habitat conditions along railroad
- Improve habitat in thermal refuge areas
- Expand and diversify riparian vegetation

Kelley Turner, Lummi Nation, walked through the anticipated project timeline, noting that the project is still in the beginning stages. The project began in 2024 with the existing conditions analysis, which was presented at the first community workshop on September 10th, 2024. Now, the project team is drafting conceptual design alternatives based on community feedback. The selected alternative will then be refined and advanced to preliminary (60%) design construction plans, then further refined to the 90% design phase. After the 90% design is complete (likely in 2026), the proposed design will be submitted to FEMA for CLOMR review (Conditional Letter of Map Revision) to ensure the design will not increase flood risk. Depending on the CLOMR review process and timeline, construction could begin in either summer 2027 or 2028.

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Outreach to Date

Kate Galambos, Triangle Associates, outlined the outreach with the community to date for the project. Key milestones include:

- March 2024: Project Introduction Letter sent to landowners
- April 2024: Landowner Access Requests to complete existing conditions analysis
- September 10th, 2024: Community Workshop #1
- November 19th, 2024: Landowner Site Visits

Design Concepts Overview & Discussion

The Natural Systems Design (NSD) team gave an overview of the three design concepts. The concepts were developed to both meet the restoration goals of the project and address landowner concerns. Laura Zanetto and Nic Truscott, NSD, noted that the purpose of the three concepts is to illustrate a range of options for restoration design. Laura walked through the key elements that address the overall project goals. The design elements in each concept seek to address elevated water temperatures, lack of in-stream habitat diversity, elevated presence of fine sediment, and decreased stream flow.

Each concept incorporates additional restoration elements, with Concept A being the most conservative and Concept C achieving the most habitat the benefit to salmon. Key highlights of each concept are below; the concept maps are available **here.**

Concept A – Instream Focus

- Engineered log jams strategically placed to increase thermal refuge (cool pools of water for salmon)
- Expansion of riparian corridor with plantings on both riverbanks
- Targeted excavation of side channels to reconnect the mainstem channel with historic and new off-channel habitats south of Potter Road

Concept B – Instream Focus + Targeted Off Channel Opportunities

- Builds on proposed instream work and riparian elements in Concept A
- Increased mainstem reconnection with targeted areas of excavation to reconnect existing depressions; expanded riparian plantings along new and reconnected channels
- Replaces key sections of riprap with engineered log jams to allow better distribution of river energy and improve edge habitat
- Incorporates hand-built engineered log jams to increase habitat complexity in off-channel and floodplain areas

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Concept C – Valley Scale Opportunities

- Builds on Concept B and encompasses valley-wide actions to illustrate the scale of actions that would be necessary to fully improve in-stream habitats
- Incorporates increased mainstem connectivity through excavation of additional side channels
- Proposes replacement of an undersized culvert east of the Potter Road bridge (outside the scope of this project and would require additional funding)
- Considers additional flood protection measures for structures vulnerable to increased floodplain inundation

Concept Design Questions/Comments:

- Jeff Margolis noted that there is interest in more recreation opportunities on the South Fork Nooksack and limited places to access the water. More side channels could improve access opportunities.
- Alexander Harris asked if there is a plan to pay private landowners to participate in this project and encouraged the project team to explore opportunities to incentive private landowner participation, noting that these restoration project can have a financial impact on landowners, especially agricultural landowners.
    - *Response:* The project team responded that they currently do not have funding or a process to pay landowners, however, they are interested in learning more and would like to follow up with Alex.
- Attendees asked about the proposed species that would be included in the riparian plantings, noting that climate change is causing die-off of some native species.
    - *Response:* The project team is considering a diversity of native tree species to plant in riparian areas that are more resilient to heat and drought.
- Attendees noted that these design concepts should be developed with anticipated climate scenarios rather than current conditions to address increasing rain events, flooding, and other impacts. Whatcom County is completing a Compound Flood Vulnerability Assessment to model climate impacts. The study is focusing on the following regions of the County: coastal county, Ferndale to Deming, and the South Fork valley.
- Attendees noted the importance of getting more community members aware of the project and ensuring landowners have a voice in the design development process; highlighting that a number of key landowners were not present at the community workshop.
    - Response: The project team agreed about the importance of collaborating with landowners. In addition to workshops, the project team has met one-on-one with landowners not present. Additional one-on-one site visits may be necessary soon.
    - Following NSD's presentation of the design concepts, Melanie facilitated a more focused conversation about each of the three concepts using large maps to solicit input from the landowners in the project reach. Key highlights of the conversation included:

- Concerns regarding the safety of engineered log jams. Rick Batdorf explained that he uses his property for recreation and camping with his grandkids and he is concerned that log jams will be unsafe for his grandkids.
- Landowners expressed a desire to talk to their neighbors who were not at the workshop about their thoughts on the designs before coming to any decisions.
- Attendees emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with agricultural landowners in the valley to find solutions that work to address the needs of farmers, fish, and flood risk reduction.

Detailed notes were captured on concept maps during the discussion. The project team is reviewing these notes to ensure participants feedback informs next steps.

Wrap Up & Next Steps

Laura explained the next steps for the design process is to incorporate the feedback from this workshop and one-on-one landowner meetings to develop a preliminary design.

Melanie noted that the project team will continue to reach out to landowners who were not present at the workshop to hear their feedback and encouraged the workshop attendees to talk to their neighbors about the project and reach out with any questions.

The community can find project updates, including the Community Workshop #2 meeting materials, on the project website here. To join the project listserv, please email outreach@triangleassociates.com with your name.